

### Jesuit Theater and Drama

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### Abstract and Keywords

The historic Jesuit theater represents two centuries of didactic theater in which the Society of Jesus, following both the organizational instructions and *Spiritual Exercises* of founder Ignatius of Loyola, used theater to inculcate virtue in both performer and audience member while teaching Latin, dance, poise, rhetoric, oratory, and confidence to the students who performed. Jesuit spirituality is inherently theatrical, and conversely Jesuit theater was intended to also be highly spiritual. The dramaturgy and scenography was spectacular and designed to draw audiences who would delight in them and learn the moral lessons the Jesuits hoped to teach while simultaneously drawing them away from a corrupt public theater. This essay considers Jesuit drama and theater in four key aspects: (1) Jesuit spirituality and performative practice; (2) the historic Jesuit educational theater of early modern Europe; (3) Jesuit drama in the missions outside of Europe; and (4) contemporary Jesuits involved in theater.

Keywords: Jesuit theater, Jesuit drama, dramaturgy, Jesuit, Society of Jesus, Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius of Loyola, virtue

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### Introduction

Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), a former Basque soldier, founded the Society of Jesus, colloquially known as the Jesuits, in 1540 as an evangelical and educational order, although the founding document refers to the members of the order as “soldiers of God ... to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine” (qtd. in O’Malley et al. 2006, xxxv). Although organized along the lines of a military order, the Jesuits were also trained and commanded by Ignatius to use creativity and imagination as part of their work. Indeed, Ignatian spirituality as outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius is highly theatrical in nature and can be compared, not unfairly, to the exercises of Konstantin Stanislavski. In short, the Jesuits are a highly theatrical order who have employed theater and drama through the entire history of the order to educate, evangelize, and reflect upon human experience. The Soci-

ety of Jesus is an inherently theatrical order, albeit one that is highly paradoxical in its approach to drama and performance.

The drama of the Jesuits was no mere training for religious life or an exercise in spiritual development alone. The influence of the Jesuits on early modern drama cannot be overstated. Jesuit theater was the professional theater in the Holy Roman Empire in the seventeenth century. Molière (1622–1673) and Pierre Corneille (1606–1684) were Jesuit-trained. Jesuits invented a wide variety of theatrical architectural styles, design, and scenographic elements, and special effects for the stage. Garry Wills (1996) even argues that one cannot understand Shakespeare's *Macbeth* without understanding the role of Jesuits as theatrical villains in Renaissance England, the order itself identified as a performative one.

Jesuit theater from its very inception demonstrated theatrical sophistication and invention in dramaturgy, scenography, and performance, combined with a strong moral content. Paradoxically, the Jesuits feared and dismissed the professional theater performed concurrent to it as leading the faithful astray. From 1551, when the first Jesuit play was performed, to 1773, when the order was suppressed, the Jesuits wanted to make good Catholics and more Jesuits, not secular actors or dramatists. Another paradox of Jesuit drama was that in spite of this disregard for the secular stage, the Jesuits created remarkable drama (often the most “professional” performances in the locale in which the Jesuits presented theater) which then had a profound influence on the secular drama, educating and influencing such theater artists as Molière, Corneille, and Félix Lope de Vega (1562–1635). This tension between the sacred and educational purposes and the entertaining performances would be resolved differently in the minds of the Jesuits than it would their secular audiences: As Hilaire Kallendorf reports, in Bologna, “the Jesuits became so synonymous with comic theatrical productions that children in the streets would point to them and shout, ‘Ecco li preti delle comedie!’ (Here come the comedy priests!)” (2007, 12).

This essay will consider Jesuit drama and theater in four key aspects: (1) Jesuit spirituality and performative practice, examining the inherently dramatic nature of Ignatian spirituality; (2) the historic Jesuit drama and educational theater of early modern Europe, paying close attention to dramaturgy, scenography, and performance practice; (3) Jesuit drama in the missions outside of Europe, particularly in Asia; and (4) contemporary Jesuits involved in professional theater.

## A Performative Spirituality

When he ascended the gallows at Tyburn to be publicly hung, drawn, and quartered on December 1, 1581, Father Edmund Campion, SJ (1540–1581), who had penned several Jesuit dramas including the popular *Ambrosia* in 1576, proclaimed to the crowd, “Non est theatralibus scenis vita nostra dissimili” (“A theatrical scene and our lives are not dissimilar”) (qtd. in Daddario 2011, 13). Campion understood as a Jesuit the performative nature of existence. Even in the moment of his martyrdom, he read it as a spectacle staged by

the State for an audience, to which he attempted to offer a counter performance. From the origins of the order, Jesuits were aware of the performative nature of life, and Ignatius had shaped the Jesuits with a spirituality.

Max Harris argues that Ignatius's contemplative approach to scripture in the *Spiritual Exercises* signifies a "theatrical hermeneutics" presaging Stanislavski (1990, 27). Long before Stanislavski, Ignatius of Loyola introduced a sort of "magic if" of the imagination in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Indeed, the *Exercises* rely upon sense memory and imagination. For example, on the first day of the second week, one is required to use affective memory, sense memory, and imagination to conceive of one's self as present at the Nativity:

The second prelude is to form a mental image of the scene and see in my imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. I will consider its length and breadth, and whether it is level or winding through valleys and over hills. I will also behold the place of the cave of the Nativity, whether it is large or small, whether high or low, and what it contains ...

The first point is to see the persons: Our Lady and St. Joseph, the servant girl and the Child Jesus after his birth. *I will become a poor, miserable, and unworthy slave looking upon them, contemplating them, and ministering to their needs, as though I were present there.* (1964, 71; italics added)

The italicized section reflects Ignatius's approach: that the person undergoing the exercises assumes the role of a slave present at the birth of Jesus, a character not mentioned in scripture at all. Characteristics, action, and motivation are given and the practitioner uses his imagination to develop that role in order to better understand Christ.

Similarly, the fifth exercise of the first week is to imagine one's self in hell. As with Stanislavski, one uses one's imagination to fully perceive using all the senses to create the given circumstances:

First point: To see in imagination the great fires, and the souls enveloped, as it were, in bodies of fire.

Second point: To hear the wailing, the screaming, cries, and blasphemies against Christ our Lord and all His saints.

Third point: To smell the smoke, the brimstone, the corruption, and rottenness.

Fourth point: To taste bitter things, as tears, sadness and remorse of conscience.

Fifth point: With the sense of touch to feel how the flames surround and burn souls. (1964, 59)

In addition to sensually imagining the circumstances of hell, one then imagines the character of Satan. In short, the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* are a form of acting exercise in

which one imagines oneself as a character in various biblical situations and explores what it means, physically, emotionally, and (most important) spiritually to experience it.

Ignatius also recognized the importance of theater in training the members of his order as public orators and performers: “Saint Ignatius encouraged young Jesuits to study the pagan classics and purportedly even recommended that they seek inspiration from and enhancement of their oratorical skills by standing in the ruins of ancient Rome and practicing them there” (Fagiolo 2003, 246). The “pagan classics” Fagiola speaks of are primarily the orations and pagan dramas of Rome. We should carefully note that Ignatius was not encouraging theater for theater’s sake, but rather performance and rehearsal as a means to better evangelize. For Ignatius, performance was always a means to an end: teaching students Latin, oration, and poise, learning how to better orate, a means to reach the unconverted, and so on. For Ignatius, the theater “was a way to assert, encourage, and express the anthropological unity of the human person ... [and] to ensure the full promotion of the human” (Zanlonghi 2007, 538–539).

As a result, theatricality informs Ignatian spiritual practice and, in turn, Ignatius’s writing then shaped how Jesuit drama was conceived and developed. Indeed, René Fülöp-Miller argues:

The tendencies, plots, theatrical methods and modes of presentation of the Jesuit theatre correspond in an unmistakable manner to the hell and passion drama prescribed by Ignatius in the Exercises. It might almost seem that the dramatists and stage managers of this theatre, mindful of all those things that Ignatius had tried to awaken in the imagination of his followers, had now brought them to a real stage, assisted by striking settings, costumes and properties. (1930, 409)

In other words, not only do the exercises prescribe something resembling the exercises of method acting as a form of spiritual development, those exercises shaped the dramaturgy and subject matter of the Jesuit drama that subsequently developed.

Conversely, Will Daddario (2011, 13–14) finds a paradox in the writings of Jesuit scholar Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli who writes of “an affinity between the Jesuit order and theatrical practice” but also warns of the “wanton lifestyle” of those who perform theater and the historic immorality and pagan affinities linked to the performance of plays as well. The Jesuits embraced theater as a didactic tool, even as they feared its potential for immorality. They recognized its power, but worked to ensure the students seeing and performing the shows realized the drama was a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

Paradoxically, despite its inherent spiritual nature, Joohee Park (2010, 30) argues that Jesuit college theater is “a dialectical result of Humanism and Counter Reformation,” advancing both Catholic theology and theater simultaneously and rooted in the secular advances of the Renaissance. Ignatius sought to meld the excitement for classical culture with a conservative Catholic theology.

More recently, James Martin, SJ, identifies what he calls “the spirituality of acting,” “wherein the actor places themselves in the persona of another character and so has to be compassionate towards the character, has to understand the character, and has to love the character in a sense” (Jackson 2011, 82). As will be discussed later, contemporary Jesuits working in the theater see a continued link to the original Ignatian spirituality and find in the theater both didactic purpose and means by which audiences and performers can embrace the teachings of Ignatius.

## Jesuit Drama and Theatrical Practices in Jesuit Schools

At a time when theater and drama and Europe had divorced itself from the Church, as medieval drama transitioned into the more secular Renaissance drama, the Jesuits reinvigorated their theater with a spirituality and with religious content for didactic purposes. René Fülöp-Miller calls this “a theatrical Counter-Reformation” (1930, 410). The Jesuit theater began in the Jesuit schools, colleges, and universities of Europe and spread all over the world in the next two centuries (see Griffin 1976).

The first school founded by the order was the Jesuit college at Messina, where, in 1551, a tragedy was performed by the students. *Fabulae Eruditiae* (learned fairy tales) were also subsequently performed by the lay students. Jesuit *colegios* in Spain began performing plays by Pedro Pablo de Acevedo (1522–1573), a Jesuit at the *colegio* in Seville, in the 1550s as well, of which at least twenty-five survive. By 1600 the Jesuits had over two hundred schools, universities, and seminaries, most if not all of which offered some kind of public performance as part of the educational process. By 1706 that number had increased to 769 schools all over the world. In some parts of Europe, the Jesuits held a virtual monopoly on education, including parts of France, Austria, southern Germany, and Spain. And almost without exception, all of those schools performed plays, resulting in a huge body of dramatic literature and numerous public and private performances. According to Robert S. Miola, in the seventeenth century, “at least one hundred thousand Jesuit dramas played on European stages” (2007, 329).

The performers and the audiences alike were the school’s students, although, as noted below, parents, patrons, and other personages of note would be invited to attend certain performances as well. Cardinal Richelieu, Cardinal Mazarin, and Louis XIV were all supporters and regular patrons of Jesuit drama in France.

On February 12, 1556, Ignatius wrote a letter to “Those Going to Begin the College in Prague by Commission,” stating, “There might be occasional presentations of dialogues, poetry or declamations, as at Rome [dramatic plays], to aid and encourage the students and their families and to gain authority for the classes” (2006, 636). The founder of the order literally advised the newest Jesuit college to regularly present plays. The three reasons he states for doing so are: first, to encourage the students so they might have a sense of what they are actually learning (Latin, Rhetoric, poise, and balance); second, to

encourage the parents so that they might see that their children are learning; and third, to demonstrate the skills learned at a Jesuit school.

It should be noted that this letter, composed by Ignatius in the year of his death at a time by which thirty-three Jesuit colleges had been established, set the standard by which the Jesuits would subsequently approach theater. Although Ignatius “didn’t have an artistic bone in his body, he bequeathed to the Jesuit order and its institutions a sensibility, an appreciation for the revelatory power of the imagination,” according to Thomas Lucas, SJ (2015, 8). In other words, Ignatius ordered Jesuit schools to perform plays as part of the students’ training.

The French Jesuit Charles Porée (1675–1741) in 1733 praised the theater for its educational potential, an attitude most Jesuits shared: “Is there any duty, whether of a private or public of a domestic or civil nature, which the theatric muse does not inculcate? ... Is there any species of virtue she does not recommend? Is there any kind of vice from which she does not deter us?” (qtd. in Lueger 2010, 3). The Jesuits who followed Ignatius for the next two centuries took his advice to heart and placed Jesuit drama at the center of Jesuit education for the purposes it could achieve.

The *Ratio Studiorum*, the abbreviation of *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu* (The Official Plan for Jesuit Education) was a document promulgated by the order first in 1599 that standardized Jesuit education around the world, with later editions reflecting the changes in the order’s approach to education. The guidelines for Jesuit theater are covered in Section IV, which deals with *studia inferiora* (lower subjects), including Latin, rhetoric, and the humanities. The *Ratio Studiorum* outlined the approach to be taken in performing theater in Jesuit schools and followed the prescriptions of Ignatius from his 1556 letter. The *Ratio* also forbids the representation of women on stage and the wearing of women’s clothing by male actors, although this rule was more honored in the breach than the observance, and eventually plays like *Esther* (first performed in 1577) and *Mary Magdalene* became popular at the colleges (Fülöp-Miller 1930, 413). The *Ratio* also encouraged the production of one play per year at Jesuit colleges.

The purpose of Jesuit drama is didactic on multiple levels. First, the student actors learned how to speak in public, making them better orators and preachers. The theater, it was thought, improved public speaking, even of non-theatrical material: “Poetry grows cold and lifeless in the absence of theatre,” pronounced the *Ratio* (qtd. in Levy and Kay 1996, 61). They learned grace, poise, and movement. They learned conversational Latin, as *Eloquentia Latina* (eloquence in Latin) was highly valued. Lastly, the Jesuits believed performing in plays improved the memory, as learning one’s lines exercised that facility. The 1586 version of the *Ratio Studiorum* saw performance as a means by which memory might be improved, physical and vocal control mastered, and by which the skills taught by the *colegios* might be demonstrated, especially to the parents: “Our students and their parents become wonderfully enthusiastic, and at the same time very attached to our Society when we train the boys to show the result of their study, their acting ability, and their ready memory on the stage” (qt. in Lucas 2015, 9).

Audiences learned moral lessons and the need for virtue. They also learned the value of a Jesuit education. In the missions, the dramas also taught the precepts of Christianity, stories from the Bible and theology. Additional benefits from the theater were also seen by individual Jesuits. In 1690, in *The Delight and Utility of the Acting of Young People*, a Jesuit discussed casting practices, noting, “indeed, little boys should be suitably mixed in as well so that they might learn to acquire some social self-confidence at an early age” (qtd. in Brandt and Hogendoorn 1993, 56).

It is important to note that actor training in the Jesuit schools was not intended for the professional theater, although some former students would go on to become professional performers and playwrights, most notably Molière. Instead Ignatius wanted theater to serve as a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. Thus, the theater would also have to be closely watched in order to avoid the errors found in secular drama. According to the *Ratio Studiorum* (1577 edition):

Comoedias et Tragoedias rarissime agi permittat, et non nisi Latinas ac decentes, et prius aut ipse eas examinet, aut aliis examinandas committat; eas vero atque alias genus actiones in Ecclesia fieri omnino prohibeat.

[Tragedies and comedies should be approved for performance but seldom, and not unless they are in Latin and morally upright; before [performance] they should be examined or entrusted to others for examination; these and other performances of this kind should be completely prohibited in church.]

(qtd. in Kallendorf 2007, 12)

The Jesuits wanted to create the “virtuous actor,” who then used theater to promote Catholic doctrine and who modeled virtuous, pious living. As Michael Zampelli, SJ (2007, 550) reminds us the Jesuits also repeatedly made extensive arguments against theatrical performance. Even as the Jesuits expanded their own theater, many Jesuits wrote antitheatrical texts attacking the public professional theater as immoral and dangerous.

Paradoxically, in the 1560s, the Jesuits were already experimenting with vernacular drama because it would advance their religious causes. There was a practical reason for these moves away from strictly religious drama in Latin. First and foremost, the Jesuits understood, a play needed “to please” a lay audience before they would pay attention to a message that would propagate the faith (Levy and Kay 1996, 59). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, after attending a Jesuit college performance in Regensburg wrote:

This public performance has again convinced me of the cleverness of the Jesuits. They despised nothing which could in any way be effective, and treated the matter with love and attention. This is not cleverness as one thinks of it *in abstracto*; it is a delight in the thing, a participation in the enjoyment that is given, as in the ordinary ways of life. Just as this great religious society counts among its numbers organ-builders, sculptors, and gilders, so are there some also who devote themselves with knowledge and inclination to the theatre, and in the same manner in

which they distinguish their churches by a pleasing magnificence, these intelligent men here have made themselves masters of the worldly senses by means of a theatre worthy of respect.

(qtd. in Fülöp-Miller 1930, 419).

Goethe's remarks reflect the intent of the Jesuits: to delight and entertain in order to teach about Catholic doctrine and argue against the Reformation.

As such, the Jesuits sought to develop brilliant, captivating performances in an accessible acting style, in addition to advancements in scenography and theater technology, designed to delight an audience. The first book written in Germany about acting was most likely *Dissertatio de actione scenica* (Dissertation on Stage Acting, 1727) written in Latin by Franz (Franciscus) Lang, SJ (1654–1725) (Brandt and Hogendoorn 1993, 57). Lang had been the director of theater at a Jesuit school in Munich for much of his life and wrote his text to teach other Jesuits how to teach performing for Jesuit theater. He includes chapters on how to stand and walk on stage, “the proper management of arms, elbows and hands,” the last of which is “the mightiest tool of the art of acting,” and even includes “the question of whether gloves should or could be worn by actors on stage,” arguing that to wear them is to limit the actor in his ability to gesture effectively, and how to express emotion on stage (in Brandt and Hogendoorn 1993, 58, 60). Lang's book interestingly has little to say about virtue or morality and is focused on how to act realistically and effectively, including instruction on movement, dialogue, emotion, and even how to position one's self in “dialogue scenes” in order to be heard by the audience but still be seen as directly speaking to other characters (Brandt and Hogendoorn 1993, 60–61).

As Jesuit drama developed, the productions began to move out of the schools and be performed on other occasions as well. The Feast of Corpus Christi, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and other Church festival and feast days would and could be celebrated with a play. Local feast days, the canonization of saints, or celebrations of events specific to the Jesuits (anniversaries of the founding of the order, for example), were all occasions for performance. William H. McCabe, SJ, reports, “when the various European capitals rejoiced in royal marriages, often a part of the celebration was a Jesuit play” (1983, 16). By the seventeenth century, Jesuit drama was found both in and out of the schools, but the same high standards of performance and high standards for virtue in dramaturgy held regardless of occasion.

## Jesuit Dramaturgy and Dramatists

As Jesuit drama was didactic, the Jesuit dramatists followed three primary dramaturgical rules (Levy and Kay 1996, 63; Park 2010, 37–38). First, the protagonist had to undergo a moral struggle that ended in a noble decision, so the audience would have a model for moral decision-making in their own lives. Second, the characters needed to be close to the age and class of the audience, so that they might be better able to understand the



struggle. Third, there must be a villain who is punished in the end, so the consequence of negative moral action can be seen.

The subject matter of drama ranged widely from biblical stories to retellings of classical mythology, folktales, historical incidents and personages (Jesuits wrote plays about Alexander the Great, Richard III, Julius Caesar, and many others), lives of the saints and martyrs, stories of Jesuit missionaries to other parts of the world and of those who would destroy the Order, Christianity or both, and even extending to the morality play, in which characters were the personification of abstractions in order to teach a moral lesson. The Jesuit playwrights would also not hesitate to flatter or celebrate the local rulers and sponsors, by whose grace the Jesuit colleges were allowed to open—many dramatists display an awareness of good politics in their dramas (Park 2010, 38). Jesuit playwrights were also encouraged to mine local history for subject matter for drama in order to better interest the local population as well as keep the play relatable (Shore 2007, 133).

The plays themselves were initially in Latin, in keeping with the desire to use the theater to instruct in that language, but eventually numerous plays began to be written in the vernacular as well. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, most plays were written in the vernacular. Not all plays were published (though many were), but manuscripts were circulated and the best dramas would be performed at many Jesuit colleges in various nations.

Some of the playwrights were significant because of who they were and some became significant because of their playwriting. In the former category, Edmund Campion, SJ, penned *Ambrosia* (1576), a play about Saint Ambrose confronting heresy. Campion himself, as a Jesuit in England, believed he was doing the same thing and the play offers a lesson to young Catholics about defending the Church and their Catholic faith, even unto death (see Campion 1970). Significant playwrights in the latter category include Luis da Cruz, SJ (Portugal), Jacob Bidermann, SJ (Germany), Jacob Masen, SJ (Germany), Pedro Pablo de Acevedo, SJ (Spain), Francisco Ximénez, SJ (Spain), Juan Bonifacio, SJ (Spain), Nikolaus of Avancini, SJ (Italy, but writing in Vienna), Nicolas Caussin, SJ (France), Joseph Simon, SJ (England, but writing in Rome), and Stefano Tuccio, SJ (Italy), along with hundreds of other Jesuit college instructors.

Bidermann (1578–1639) was not only famous as a Jesuit playwright; he is arguably “Munich’s leading dramatist” of the seventeenth century and a contemporary of Lope de Vega (McCabe 1983, 24). His most famous, effective, and produced play was *Cenodoxus* (New beliefs, 1602), a dramatic refutation of Luther’s doctrine of *sola scriptura* that also draws on the *Spiritual Exercises*. Miola reports that “the play accomplished more than a hundred sermons” (2007, 344). In 1609 in Munich, the actor playing the title character was so moved by playing the role he joined the Jesuits and took holy orders and fourteen people asked to perform the *Spiritual Exercises* (Miola 2007, 344; see also Best 1974).

Bidermann’s countryman and successor, Jacob Masen, SJ (1606–1681) is arguably second only to Bidermann in the Holy Roman Empire as a significant and influential playwright of Jesuit dramas. Masen wrote seven plays: *Androphilus*, *Philippus bonus* (later renamed

*Rusticus imperans*), *Telesbius*, *Barlaam and Josephatus*, *Maurice* (Masen's only tragedy), *Ollaria*, and *School of Bacchus*. The plays were all written in Latin for performance by his students, but were subsequently translated into German for popular performance as well. Masen served as director of his plays when they were initially performed, and even played the role of Prince Philip in *Philippus bonus* in Münster in 1645 (Halbig 1987, 4). According to Michael C. Halbig, Masen "is not an extreme formalist," and Masen himself wrote that "the proper place of the dramatist is with the actor in the theatre" (1987, 9). Masen's drama marked a continuation of the Ignatian model for theater: inculcate virtue in the audience while teaching Latin and oratory to the performers. Masen also wrote the *Primer for Drama*, a theoretical exploration of the theater that also presented his thoughts on grammar, rhetoric, and classical models for drama such as Plautus, Terence, and Seneca.

In 1622, in honor of the canonization of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier, the Collegio Romano staged *Apotheosis sine consecratia S. Ignatio et Francis Xaverii* (The apotheosis or consecration of Saints Ignatius and Francis Xavier), which combined acting, ballet, and opera. The prologue of the piece featured Wisdom personified "enthroned in the clouds," speaking directly to the students, followed by a dramatization of the lives of the two saints (Fagiolo 2003, 231–232). In addition, there were scenes set in hell, a scene in which Ignatius was attacked by demons who were in league with the enemies of the order, and a vision: "a pageant of the Jesuit order witnessed by Ignatius" before his death, showing the success of the order (Bjurström 1972, 101–102). This drama would also introduce a major theme in historic Jesuit drama, which is the celebration of the Jesuit order itself and its history.

In Vienna, Nikolaus of Avancini (1611–1686) wrote twenty-seven plays, including *Pietus Victrix* (1659), first performed for the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I (Rädel 2013, 284). It was a memorable spectacle, featuring forty-six speaking roles, large crowd scenes, a chorus of forty, spectacular costumes, and remarkable special effects. The play's stage was purposefully built to include a number of transformation elements and the play proved so popular that an illustrated edition of the script was published.

One criticism of the Jesuit drama at the time is that it perpetuated anti-Semitism. In *Mar-iophilus* (named for its protagonist, whose name means "Lover of Mary"), a 1754 play popular at Jesuit colleges, the eponymous character is killed by Jews for Passover and is resurrected by the Virgin Mary (Shore 2007, 138).

## Jesuit Design, Scenography and Special Effects, and Dance

While initial performances began on a platform in a hall at the Jesuit college, the Jesuits rapidly began building theaters specifically for performance. As such, they contributed to the development of stage architecture and theatrical design, and pioneered the use of special effects, including the trap door, the revolve, flying effects, clouds, and scenes set

at sea. The support of various royal and aristocratic houses, which could be approached for a loan of furniture, meant that some colleges would have realistic and gorgeous sets for scenes taking place inside palaces or the houses of nobility.

One of the key reasons for Jesuit invention in technical theater was the belief that spectacle would draw crowds and compete successfully with other entertainments. Fülöp-Miller reports, “From the very beginning, the Jesuits sought to fascinate the public with brilliant settings, scenic effects and complicated technical apparatus, and by those means to entice them from the wandering troupes of actors and the Protestant school theatres” (1930, 417). As a result, the Jesuit theater was the most technologically advanced and scenographically sophisticated theater in Europe for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Numerous Jesuits made contributions to the visual development of theater and the theorizing of the design elements of the stage. Athenasius Kircher, SJ, perfected the Magic Lantern, as noted in his book *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (The great art of light and shadow, 1646), combining a magnifying lantern with transparent slides to create projected images with which to tell a story or illustrate a lecture. Among his most famous images are a soul in Purgatory and a skeletal death with an hourglass and a scythe (Godwin 2009, 211–213). He used the images to dramatically illustrate his lectures on light and shadow, but the images themselves reinforced Catholic doctrine. Jean Dubreuil, SJ (1602–1670), who signed his illustrations “The Jesuit,” wrote *La Perspective Pratique* (Treatise on perspective, 1649), which had a profound influence on artists, architects, and theatrical designers. Andrea Pozzo, SJ (1642–1709) was a Jesuit brother, a painter, architect, art theorist, and stage designer whose book *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (Pictorial and architectural perspective, 1693, 1698) also had a shaping influence on theatrical design as well. So rooted in dynamic, active naturalistic imagery are Pozzo’s paintings, German scholar Felix Burda-Stengel (2001, 2013) compares them with contemporary video art.

In addition, the Jesuits highly valued dance, especially ballet, as part of the training of young men, and conversely Jesuit ballet shaped the form of secular ballet practice. René Fülöp-Müller asserts that “it was on the Jesuit stage that the ballet assumed that character of magnificent sets which it has maintained from then on to the present day” (1930, 416).

## Jesuit Influence on Secular Drama in Early Modern Europe

Jesuit drama “played a significant cultural role in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries” (Shore 2007, 133). In the Holy Roman Empire, the Jesuit theater was the dominant theater. In France, Spain, Italy, and the Holy Roman Empire, Jesuit colleges, despite their suspicion of the professional theater, ended up training generations of actors and

playwrights who, after their education, used the techniques learned from the Jesuits to improve the professional theater.

Molière was trained at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont in Paris from 1632 to 1639, performing plays in Latin, his first experience in theater (indeed, Molière was born the year Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier were canonized, and the Jesuits would have a profound effect on his development as a person, performer, and playwright). Louis XIV and Cardinal Mazarin were known to attend the performances at Clermont. Molière's debt to the Jesuits can be found in his early career as a performer and in his dramaturgy.

Pierre Corneille was Jesuit-trained and first experienced theater in a Jesuit school, as did the Spanish playwrights Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molino, and Calderon de la Barca. Lope de Vega studied at the Jesuit Colegio Imperial in Madrid from 1572 to 1574 and may have studied under famed Jesuit playwright Pedro Pablo de Acevedo.

Jesuits such as Francisco Ximénez, Juan de Pineda, José de Acosta, Bartolomé Bravo, Diego Calleja, Juan de Cigorondo, Luis de la Cruz, Antonio Escobar y Mendoza, Miguel Enríquez, Pedro Fomperosa y Quintana, Salvador de León, Cristóforo Mansilla, Baltasar Menéndez, Pedro de Morales, Juan Pérez Ramírez, Alonso Román, Pedro de Salas, Luis de Valdivia, Pedro Victoria, Tomás de Villacastín, Hernando de Ávila, Guillermo Barcalo, Agustín Moreto, and Valentín de Céspedes all taught in *colegios* and were also dramatists (Kallendorf 2007, 14). Their plays profoundly shaped both their students and the expectations of the audiences who turned to the professional theater anticipating a similar level of quality.

## Drama in the Jesuit Missions

Upon arrival in a new territory, the Jesuits would use theater as a form of proselytization and education. India, Japan, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Paraguay, among others, saw the use of Jesuit drama as a tool of conversion and education. A Jesuit missionary in India wrote, "Nothing has attracted the poetry-loving Indians more effectively than our plays" (Fülöp-Miller 1930, 411). Whereas the initial plays were in Latin, most missions realized that in order to reach the local population plays must be performed in the local vernacular.

Let us use Japan as an example of drama in the Jesuit missions. The first Jesuits in Japan used theater as a missionary tool. Thomas Leims has documented the use of Mystery Plays by the Jesuits from the moment of their arrival in Japan. By 1560, Leims asserts, Christian Mystery Plays were "flourishing" (1988, 206). Dubbed "Kirishitan Monogatari" (Tales of the Christians), plays were used to explain Christian theology, teach biblical stories and encourage the audience to convert to Catholicism. In the face of linguistic barriers, these plays offered a visual element missing from traditional preaching that often was effective in appealing to audiences.

The Jesuits in Japan (and elsewhere) used plays not only to teach Christianity but to teach Latin to Japanese converts and assist European Jesuits with their Japanese. In 1594 the Jesuit seminary at Arima used “dialogues in Latin” written by Jesuits and performed by Japanese students (Boxer 1951, 205). Plays were also written and performed in Japanese to promote Christianity. “In one,” Boxer reports, “the devil and Buddhist priests were triumphantly vanquished by Christian angels and [Japanese] converts” (1952, 207). The Jesuits brought their model of theater with them to non-European lands as a tool of conversion and education.

Conversely, Japan became a dominant subject in Jesuit theater back in Europe. “More than four hundred plays on Japanese subjects were written in Latin and performed in various Jesuit venues in European countries,” according to Takenaka Masahiro (1999, 159). In the seventeenth century, Japan served as subject matter for Jesuit drama in the West.

Not only did the Jesuits use Western drama in Japan and use Japan as subject matter for contemporary drama in the West, they used the traditional theater of Japan to advance the order in Japanese society and to teach the Japanese language to Jesuit missionaries. The samurai class sought prestige and sophistication that contact with the West and the arts brought in Tokugawa Japanese society. C. R. Boxer observes, “Many of the military feudal aristocracy, often upstarts brought to power by the fortunes of war, were anxious not to appear culturally inferior to the Kuge of Kyoto, and this in itself gave stimulus to the arts” (1952, 45). Given the Jesuits’ proclivity and history of using the arts to proselytize and teach, employing the traditional arts of Japan made sense. For example, Padre Manuel Alvarez’s *De Institutione Grammatica*, a Latin grammar textbook used in Jesuit schools throughout Europe was translated and printed at Amakusa in 1594 using the dialect of kyogen, the comic drama that accompanies the more serious performances of Nō, as a model for Latin construction (Boxer 1951, 194).

## The End of Historic Jesuit Theater

The Society of Jesus was suppressed in 1773 by order of a papal bull, *Dominus ac Redemptor Noster* (“Our Lord and Savior”), issued by Pope Clement XIV on July 21. Only in Prussia and Russia, where Catherine the Great, a supporter of the order, ruled, did the Society continue to exist. The end of the Society meant the end of both Jesuit schools and Jesuit drama. The order was restored in 1814 by Pope Pius VII in *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum* (“The care of all Churches”), but the damage to the theater had been done. The restored order did not focus on theater in the schools in the way the original Jesuits had and the dramatists and theater makers that emerged in the nineteenth century were amateurish at best. Partly this can also be attributed to the more conservative nature of the order after it was restored, and partly to the loss of skills and techniques due to a nearly half-century break with the tradition of Jesuit drama. It would not be until the mid- to late twentieth century that individual Jesuits would draw attention for their work in the professional theater.

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## Contemporary Jesuits and the Theater

In the present, the Jesuit's interest in educational theater continues. There are twenty-eight Jesuit universities and fifty-nine Jesuit secondary schools in United States, and one hundred eighty-nine Jesuit universities all over the world, in addition to hundreds of secondary schools, many of which have theater programs. Numerous Jesuits are involved in theater and in educational theater around the world, and while the moral imperative of the *Ratio* may no longer be in effect, the contemporary Jesuit institution's theater program will often reflect the institutional mission and promote Ignatian principles.

In addition, numerous Jesuits are involved in the professional theater. The remainder of this essay will focus on four contemporary American Jesuits working in the professional theater. Their creative work also tends to celebrate and invoke Jesuit history, taking the form of plays about Jesuits and bringing Ignatian Spirituality to contemporary theater practice.

Ernest Ferlita, SJ (1928–2015), who earned his DFA in Theater from Yale University and spent most of his professional life as a professor of Theater at Loyola New Orleans, was a professional playwright with more than a dozen plays to his credit. His first major play, *The Ballad of John Ogilvie* (1968), produced off-Broadway, about the life of the eponymous Jesuit martyr and Catholic saint (1579–1616), who ministered to the few remaining hidden Catholics in Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was hanged and drawn in Glasgow for treason.

*Black Medea* (1976) has had several successful productions, including an award-winning run at the fifth annual New York City Black Theatre Festival in 1987, and sets the Greek tragedy in colonial New Orleans with Medea as a voodoo princess and Jason as a French military officer. *The Twice-Born*, an adaptation of Euripides's *Hippolytus* also set in colonial New Orleans, follows the model of historic Jesuit drama, showing a young man stuck with a moral decision, making the correct choice, facing martyrdom while the woman who attempts to seduce him is punished for her aggressive sexuality and sins. He also wrote two linked one acts about the atomic bombings of Japan, *The Bells of Nagasaki* (based on Nagai Takashi's 1949 autobiographic account) and *The Mask of Hiroshima*, an original work set seven years after the fall of the bomb and using Nō theater techniques to shape the story of a doctor dealing with the cancers caused by the bomb.

Ferlita is also the author of *The Uttermost Mark: The Dramatic Criticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1990), an analysis of the English Jesuit poet's work as theater and performance centered. Ferlita argues that Hopkins originally "was intent on writing plays," his early poems are "dramatic monologues," and that "much of his literary criticism ... is dramatic criticism," further noting that Hopkins himself suggested his poems were "made for performance" (1990, xi). In other words, the English Jesuit's work can only truly be understood in the context of the theater. Ferlita also wrote *The Theatre of Pilgrimage*. In short, Father Ferlita's work as both a dramatist and scholar of theater has been to celebrate the history of New Orleans and the Jesuits, to embrace the model of historic Jesuit

dramaturgy in terms of teaching virtue, and to explore the religious and spiritual nature of historic and contemporary theater.

Rick Curry, SJ, born without a right hand and forearm, trained as an actor but found discrimination against the disabled was rampant in theater, film, and television. He received his doctorate in theater from New York University, writing on the history of Jesuit drama. In 1977 he founded the National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped (NTWH) in New York City. Arguing that most theater schools ignore the disabled, the NTWH offers classes in acting and produces performances with handicapped actors. More recently, in the wake of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Father Curry established the Academy for Veterans at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, a NTWH project for vets that includes the performing arts, teaching wounded vets to write and perform their own pieces. Father Curry's work demonstrates one of the dominant themes of contemporary Jesuit theater: a dedication to social justice and the use of theater to promote human dignity, as defined by the Catholic Church.

In *A Jesuit Off-Broadway*, Father James Martin, SJ, describes his work as the company chaplain and theological advisor for the premiere production of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* by Stephen Adly Guirgis in 2005 by the Labyrinth Theater Company at the Public Theatre in New York City. Father Martin, best known for his work as the editor of *America* magazine, his books on Jesuits, and his appearances on popular television programs such as *The Colbert Report*, spent six months working with the largely secular cast, helping them understand the history of first-century Palestine, the theology behind Christianity in general, and the ideas the play wrestles with specifically. Martin's book also demonstrates his own evolving understanding of the theater and an appreciation for what happens behind the scenes. In the fifth chapter, Martin links Ignatius's concept of imaginative prayer to Jesuit drama and Guirgis's play (2007, 215–217). Martin himself is now a member of the LAByrinth Theatre Company.

Bill Cain, SJ, is an American Jesuit best known for his television series *Nothing Sacred*, which he created and wrote, concerning a contemporary Catholic parish. He is, however, first and foremost a playwright, whose play *Equivocation* (2009), about the Gunpowder Plot, the role Jesuits played in it, and how Shakespeare used it for *Macbeth*, premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and has since been performed in New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, and a dozen other cities, including in Canada and New Zealand. The play's title refers to a charge often leveled against the Jesuits during the English Renaissance: a logical fallacy and the use of ambiguous language to conceal the truth. His follow-up play, *Nine Circles* (2010), the title a reference to Dante's *Inferno*, was inspired by the trial of Steven Dale Green, an American soldier tried and found guilty of rape and murder while serving in Iraq and sentenced to life in prison.

# Conclusion

The historic Jesuit theater, lasting from 1551 to 1773, represents two centuries of didactic theater in which the Society of Jesus, following both the organizational instructions and *Spiritual Exercises* of founder Ignatius of Loyola, used theater to inculcate virtue in both performer and audience member while teaching Latin, dance, poise, rhetoric, oratory, and confidence to the students who performed. Jesuit spirituality is inherently theatrical, and conversely Jesuit theater was intended to also be highly spiritual. The dramaturgy and scenography was also spectacular and designed to draw audiences who would delight in them and learn the moral lessons the Jesuits hoped to teach while simultaneously drawing them away from a public theater the Jesuits feared was corrupt.

When the order was restored in 1814 the Jesuit drama had lost all efficacy and sophistication. Individual contemporary Jesuits, however, continue to be active in the professional theater, still employing theater as a means to explore and teach virtue but now also as a form of pursuing social justice.

Undeniable is the importance of Jesuit drama in the development of early modern theater. Jesuits influenced every area of theatrical development, from dramaturgy to acting, from scenography to special effect. Of equal significance are the pupils influenced by their experience of Jesuit drama, including Molière, Lope de Vega, Calderon, Corneille, Voltaire, and Goldoni. There is not a nation in Europe whose drama and theater was not influenced in some way by the Jesuits.

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## Jesuit Theater and Drama

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